Cultures and Contexts: Global Christianity
CORE-UA 500.010
Spring 2018

Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:15, Room: SILV 207, Recitations in SILV 514

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Office Hours: Fridays, 2:00-3:00pm; Office: 726 Broadway, Room 553

Virgin and Child Enthroned with Angels and St. Aquinas, St. Barnabas, St. Dominic, and St. Peter
Detail, Fra Angelico, c. 1422, Tempera on panel, 212 x 237 cm
COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course examines the ongoing global formation and reformation of Christianity, from its origins in a pluralistic ancient Mediterranean world and spread throughout Europe and the Middle East, to its historical and ever-transforming role in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Rather than attempting to identify an essential core of this complex religious and cultural formation, we will explore the problems and possibilities Christian texts, concepts, institutions, practices, and narratives have posed for a diversity of populations over distinct historical periods and regions. We will gain an appreciation both for how various populations have responded to Christianity and the ways in which these encounters have disrupted and transformed Christian narratives. Exploring this global and at times cacophonous conversation will allow us to consider how Christians have justified and reproduced, as well as critiqued and questioned the power of empires and nations, elites and tyrants, as well as reformers and critics.

The course is divided into three sections. In the first, we will look at the broad themes that tend to accompany Christianity in its various global expressions. We will cover five distinct themes, which we will then frame our conversations throughout the course: 1) incarnation & presence; 2) resurrection & absence; 3) mission & conversion; 4) sin & immanence; 5) salvation & transcendence. In the second section of the course we will look at Christian institutions and structures of power, placing the concepts from the first section in a range of political and historical contexts, including the Roman Empire, European colonial expansion, American slavery, and postcolonial Africa. In the final section of the course, we will explore a variety of Christian actors, including mystics and saints, relics and images, words and bodies, and economies and architectural forms. Keeping the five course themes in mind, we will explore how they are expressed through these material and immaterial forms.

Recitation discussions will focus on the week’s theme, often through a close reading of a primary document, or a careful examination of an image, object, or short film connected to the week’s readings.

Cultures and Contexts is intended to prepare you for life in a globalized world. Through critical engagements with primary cultural materials, it introduces you to ways humans come to understand themselves as members of social, religious, national, and regional collectives, and with the dynamics of cultural interaction and influence. By taking Global Christianity you will learn a great deal about the remarkable diversity of the most populous religion on the planet. Rather than attempting to create a narrow definition of Christianity and ascertain whether or not its various “incarnations” measure up, we will expand that which we understand Christianity – and religion – to be. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, this class is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.

COURSE TEXT
For sale at NYU bookstore and on reserve at Bobst Library:


All other readings will be made available through NYU Classes.
**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Summary Papers</td>
<td>15% (or 5% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Thematic Papers</td>
<td>20% (or 10% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christianity in the City Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation and Attendance</td>
<td>15%</td>
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**Participation and Attendance** (15 Percent)

Attendance is absolutely mandatory at lectures and recitations. Teaching assistants will take attendance at all lectures and recitations and 0.5% will be deducted from the final grade for every absence after the first two. Students who miss more than five class sessions will receive a 0 for participation and attendance. All students are expected to contribute to discussions in recitations.

**Assignments**

**Summary Papers** (15 Percent)

*Three* times throughout the semester, students will submit a 2-page, 3-paragraph discussion of selected course readings. The first two paragraphs will summarize the central argument of the text. The third will put this argument into conversation with one other text we have read this semester. Summary Papers will be due on Monday, February 5; Wednesday, March 21; and Monday, April 30.

**Thematic Papers** (20 Percent)

*Twice* throughout the semester, students will be required to submit a short (3-4-page) paper that explores *one* of the central course themes: *incarnation & presence; resurrection & absence; mission & conversion; sin & immanence; and salvation & transcendence*. In the papers, students will explore the theme, first, conceptually and, second, as it is expressed in practice in a specific historical or present-day site. Students must make reference to at least two readings from the course. Thematic Papers will be due on Wednesday, February 21; and Wednesday, April 11.

**Christianity in the City Papers** (10 Percent)

Students will visit one of New York City’s many Christian spaces or objects. This may involve visiting one of the city’s churches during or outside of services, or exploring one of the many Christian objects found in its museums. Students will then write a 4-5-page paper describing and analyzing the site in light of their chosen theme. The paper is due in class on Monday, April 2.

**Midterm** (15 Percent)

The midterm exam will be based on concepts we explore in weeks 1 through 7. The midterm will include multiple choice, short, and long answer questions. A Study Guide will be provided on Wednesday, February 28. The midterm will take place in class on Wednesday, March 7.

**Final Exam** (25 Percent)

The final exam will be based on the readings, discussions, films, and images we explore throughout the semester. It will include multiple choice, short, and long answer questions. A Study Guide will be provided in class on Monday, May 1; a review session will be held on Wednesday, May 3; and the final exam will be held in class on Monday, May 7.
GRADES

A+  97-100%  B+  87-89.9%  C+  77-79.9%  D+  67-69.9%
A   93-96.9%  B  83-86.9%  C  73-76.9%  D  63-66.9%
A-  90-92.9%  B-  80-82.9%  C-  70-72.9%  D-  60-62.9%
F   59.9% and below

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

• Use 12 point font, Times New Roman, 1-inch margins, and double-spacing
• Include your last name and page number in the footer at the bottom right of each page
• Give yourself plenty of time to proofread and edit each assignment before submission
• Bring your assignments – printed and stapled – to your Teaching Assistant at the beginning of class on the day it is due

EXTENSIONS

Absolutely no extensions will be made for any reason, apart from reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities (see below). All assignments are due in class on the due date listed on the syllabus. Of the three summary papers, the lowest grade received will be dropped for all students. If a family or personal emergency is interfering with your studies, make an appointment with the professor and your TA after meeting with your advisor.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, or learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities:
NYU’s Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Web site: www.nyu.edu/csd

NYU CLASSES

A host of course resources can be found on the NYU Classes site. On the introductory page, you will find the first five pages of the syllabus. Under the tab “Syllabus,” each day of the class has a folder with the readings for the week (except for those from the course texts available in the NYU Bookstore). At the end of each week, I will also add the slides from each lecture to the appropriate folder under the Syllabus tab. Under the “Resources” tab you can find a copy of the syllabus, and assignment sheets for each assignment. Additional resources may be added throughout the semester.

LAPTOP & CELL PHONE POLICY

Numerous studies have proven that, for most students, use of laptops for note taking does not, in fact, improve their success. In my experience, I have found my laptop to be a source of distraction rather than assistance during lectures. I strongly encourage you to use a paper notebook to take notes during class, but will ultimately leave that up to each of you. If you choose to use a laptop or any other electronic device, however, you must sit towards the back of the classroom and disable your Internet connection. Cell phone use in class is prohibited. If you must keep it with you for emergency reasons, keep it on silent and leave the classroom if you receive a call.
RESPECT IN THE CLASSROOM
Social Science and Humanities classes are spaces that strive to be open to hearing diverse opinions that challenge students and professors’ ways of thinking. In order to do so, each course must also seek to maintain an environment where everyone feels respected and valued. In this class, we will discuss difficult and contentious topics and I hope that that we can both learn from each other’s perspectives and reflect on our beliefs and values, and whether or how these may be hurtful to others. These are not easy things to do, but please note that in this classroom speech that denigrates people by virtue of race, religion, gender, or sexuality will not be tolerated.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including (but not limited to) one or more of the following: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, academic warning, disciplinary probation, suspension from the university, or dismissal from the university. Students are responsible for understanding the University’s policy on academic honesty and integrity and must make use of proper citations of sources in all written work. Take care to keep accurate notes about where ideas you are developing are coming from while studying and researching.

It is the responsibility of students to learn the procedures for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work from that of others. The full text of the policy, including adjudication procedures, is found: http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity. Check out this online tutorial to learn what plagiarism is and strategies to avoid it: http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE
As a nonsectarian, inclusive institution, NYU policy permits members of any religious group to absent themselves from classes without penalty when required for compliance with their religious obligations. The policy and principles to be followed by students and faculty may be found here: The University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT
Writing Center
We can all improve our writing; learning to write well is a never-ending process. Friends inside and outside of class can be helpful for proofreading, but the Writing Center at New York University has a host of tools to help you identify the areas in which you struggle and aid you in developing your skills: www.nyu.edu/students/undergraduates/academic-services/writing-center.html.

Me!
I am more than happy to meet with you to debate and discuss ideas and concepts we cover in the class, to offer suggestions on how to develop your research projects, to answer any questions you may have, to find more helpful ways of describing theories we read about or discussed but which were unclear to you, or just to get to know you. Please come see me during office hours! I look forward to getting to know each of you.
COURSE CALENDAR

All students are expected to come to each class having read all of the assigned readings for that day. Thus, all of the week’s readings will have been completed in time for the Friday recitations during which students will be expected to discuss these readings as well as the course lectures.

PART I: CONCEPTS, PROBLEMS & TENSIONS

In the first six weeks of the course we will identify five themes that we will return to throughout the semester: incarnation & presence; resurrection & absence; mission & conversion; sin & immanence; and salvation & transcendence.

Week 1: What is Christianity?

Who was Jesus? In what political, cultural, and religious climate did he live? How did he become Christ? This week we will explore the diversity of early Christianity and the numerous interpretations of Jesus’ life and teachings found in the first centuries following his death.

Monday, January 22
Course overview

Wednesday, January 24

Friday, January 26
Recitation Discussion: The expansiveness of Christianity

Week 2: Incarnation & Presence

For Christians, Jesus was God incarnate. He was God in fleshly form and experienced a human life as well as human death. The incarnation made God viscerally present in ways that continue to inspire Christians. This week we will explore how that presence has been taken up in a variety of material and ritual practices around the world.

Monday, January 29
Wednesday, January 31

Friday, February 2
Recitation Discussion: Incarnation & Presence

Week 3: Resurrection & Absence
With the passion and resurrection, God’s incarnated existence on earth ended and – having entered human history – he then departed. His absence brought both pain and possibility. His passing has been creatively mourned in art, images, and rituals, while his resurrection has made his spirit potentially accessible to all peoples at all times. This week we will address the power of absence in both its tragedy and possibility.

Monday, February 5 – SUMMARY PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS

Wednesday, February 7

Friday, February 9
Recitation Discussion: Resurrection & Absence

Week 4: Mission & Conversion
For centuries, the arrival of Christianity has come hand in hand with powerful structures, institutions, and empires. The missionary project of conversion – long central to Christianity – has been a key component of the production and reproduction of its power. This week we will explore the power of conversion and mission around the world.
Monday, February 12

Wednesday, February 14

Friday, February 16
Recitation Discussion: Mission & Conversion

Week 5: Sin & Immanence
Humans are fallible creatures, prone to error, selfishness, hedonism, and – at times – cruelty. Christ’s resurrection brought potential salvation from our flawed states, but only in the next world. This week we will address how Christians confront the problem of human weakness and error by finding various ways to live with sin in this world.

Monday, February 19 – President’s Day – NO CLASS

Wednesday, February 21 – THEMATIC PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS

Friday, February 23
Recitation Discussion: Sin & Immanence
**Week 6: Salvation & Transcendence**

Christ’s resurrection brought the possibility of salvation, of rising above the pain, suffering, and sin of this world and, through death, arising to something higher. This week we will explore the diversity of ways in which salvation and transcendence have been interpreted and imagined.

**Monday, February 26**


**Wednesday, February 28** – MIDTERM STUDY GUIDE DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS


**Friday, March 2**

Recitation Discussion: Salvation & Transcendence

**PART II: STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS**

In Part II, we will identify how our course themes are expressed in Christian structures and institutions. We will address how Christians have attempted to limit and define Christian beliefs and practices, and how they have also worked to structure that which is permissible in social life.

**Week 7: Doctrine & Heresy**

While we may assume that the tenants of Christianity have always been clear, the creation and reassessment of doctrine has been and continues to be an ongoing process. This week we will use a classic film to explore the work of disciplining Christian subjects.

**Monday, March 5** – Film in class – *Joan of Arc*


**Wednesday, March 7** – MIDTERM IN CLASS

**Friday, March 9**

No Recitation Sessions

**Week 8: SPRING BREAK**

**March 12-March 18** – NO CLASSES
**Week 9: Circulations & Empires**

This week we will learn about the violence and social upheaval that accompanied the expansion and decline of Christian empires.

**Monday, March 19**


**Wednesday, March 21 – SUMMARY PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS**


**Friday, March 23**

Recitation Discussion: Circulations & Empires

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**Week 10: Critique & Reform**

This week we will look at some of the critiques that led to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, as well as examples of critique and reform that preceded it and continue into the present.

**Monday, March 26**


**Wednesday, March 28**


**Friday, March 30: Reforming Christianity**

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**Week 11: Politics, Global & Local**

This week we will explore some powerful Christian political alliances and address how these alliances have, at times, worked to exclude certain groups from the broader social worlds.

**Monday, April 2 – CHRISTIANITY IN THE CITY PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

Wednesday, April 4

Friday, April 6
Recitation Discussion: Christian Politics

PART III: ACTORS, SYMBOLS, AND OBJECTS
In Part III of the course, we will explore how various Christian actors – human actors as well as others who you may not think of as having agency, such as books and words, bodies and buildings, images and spirits – engage with our five course themes.

Week 12: Mystics, Saints, & Prophets
Mystics, saints, and prophets – those with particular access to God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit – are not only found in the past, but continue to contribute to the life of Christianity in the present. This week we will explore the difference between mystics, saints, and prophets in the past and present.

Monday, April 9

Wednesday, April 11 – THEMATIC PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS

Friday, April 13
Recitation Discussion: Women and Christianity

Week 13: Objects, Spaces, & Scripture
While generally understood to be passive recipients of their creators, within a variety of Christian traditions, images, buildings, objects, and texts do work in the world. This week we will read about the remarkable power of these non-human actors.

Monday, April 16
Wednesday, April 18 – SUMMARY PAPER #3 DUE IN CLASS
1) Engelke, Matthew. “Reading and Time: Two Approaches to the Materiality of Scripture.” *Ethnos* 74 (2): 151-174. (NYU Classes)

Friday, April 20
Recitation Discussion: Objects as Actors

**Week 14: Bodies & Words**
The agency of human actors often surpasses the intentions they bring to them. With our everyday words and embodied actions, we express a great deal, altering and being altered by the social worlds we inhabit. This week we will chart the careful attention paid by a variety of Christians to words and bodies.

Monday, April 23 – Anisha Lectures

Wednesday, April 25

Friday, April 27
Recitation Discussion: Words & Bodies

**Week 15: Christian Economies**
Since Max Weber’s classic text *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, scholars have explored the curious relationship between Christianity and capitalism. This week we will address the inevitability of Christian economies in this world.

Monday, April 30 – FINAL EXAM STUDY GUIDE DISTRIBUTED

Wednesday, May 2
REVIEW SESSION

Friday, May 4
Recitation Discussion: Christian Capitalism

**Week 16: Final Exam**

*Monday, May 7 – FINAL EXAM IN CLASS*